1: Dieterlen--153b E-5 (1946-1949) 1951 FA8 Bambara FA8

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(a) Pot dipping after firing (Konodimini).

Plate IV

(b) Communal anvil, kula, of the blacksmiths (Konodimini).

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Pottery

323 773 The ancient Bambara did not know about pottery. At the time they lived in caverns, they let their meat dry in the sun on the rocks. Next, they manufactured receptacles by hollowing out stones, of which certain unused millstones /125/ seen today are copies. When they had invented fire, they cooked meat by spitting it with skewers of green sunzun wood and by exposing it to flames and live coals.

Later, they shaped and dried vessels of coarse clay, imitating the hollowed-out stones. One of these vessels, which was exposed to the fire in order to cook the food it contained, was observed to have changed color, hardened, and become more resistant. In this way they developed the technology of making pottery at a time when they still had only wooden tools.

323 326 778 575 Since this technology is related to the invention of fire, the wives of the blacksmiths were the first to practice it.(1). Today they form

1. The different techniques of pottery making were supposedly revealed to the village of Gwondougou (see p. 155) by the Soba spirits of the crossroads.

a society (tõ) in each village and own many altars entrusted to the care of the head of the society.

The principal altar, the dyo kala, which represents the thumb of the potters, is made of wood carved in the shape of a thumb and engraved with symbolic lines. To learn her trade, each initiate is lightly touched on the head with it. The head of the society spills her blood over it in the case of a broken taboo affecting the society. But its principal function is to be the receptacle for the spiritual forces of the group: upon a member's death, this object, placed upon the corpse, gathers up the soul which escapes from the body.

[252] In certain villages, the pots with holes, ñintin, used for cooking couscous, are placed near the village upon the pile of ashes from the great hearth where the pots are fired (see Pl. IV, a); they also serve as altars at the time when the potters are consecrated.

323 561 575 Since her childhood the potter, following the example of her seniors, practices kneading and shaping little pots, bokofani (literally, little clay pots). After excision at the required age, she joins

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the society during a public consecration which she receives with several others, the group forming an age grade.

After an apprenticeship of seven days, the potters decide upon the date of the ceremony which is celebrated at the firing spot near the altars. Each member provides a hairpin (bandigi), which represents her on this occasion, and the skin of a hedgehog. Disrobed in front of the assembled villages, each girl is seated in turn on the altar as an aged woman examines her genitals to verify her virginity and the proper execution of the excision.

/126/ If the young girl is no longer a virgin, she is publicly de-
331 clared dangadè (literally, bastard) and finds herself automatically excluded from the society; she will never be able to receive the potter's title. Otherwise, a proclamation is made immediately to the great joy of the public. If the excision has not been judged
304 sufficient, the patient is given the title of potter after having submitted to a new operation performed in such a way that the blood runs over the pottery (1).

1. If excision is not possible, the operation takes the form of a wound inflicted with the hedgehog's skin (see p. 243).

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An old woman then appears seated before members of the age grade and instructs them. She tells of the origin and history of pottery, apprising them of the difficulties of the craft such as fatigue, burns, etc. She teaches them patience towards the client and enumerates the rules which will have to be observed during their lifetime: to be pure in heart and to hate no one; not to undertake work shortly after having had sexual relations; to work in silence; to respect all taboos in general.

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She then makes a libation of karite oil on the altar and rubs it on the bodies of the initiates who must run their tongues over the pottery, thus making an oath. Sheep, brought by the initiates' parents, are then killed by having their throat cut over the hearth in the name of the potters while the elders of the society present to the initiates gifts consisting of several pots which they will sell for profit while waiting for their first work. This gift is moreover a sign of adoption.

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The utensils are made with clay, mbogo pasa, taken from the bottom of the watercourse or along the river's edge; they belong to

323 317 784 Faro. These places have as taboos the wearing of indigo and pregnancy. No pregnant woman may approach them without provoking the death of the child she is carrying, thus ultimately impairing the durability of pottery and seriously harming the society of which she is a member.

323 796 An annual sacrifice is offered by the potters at the end of the winter season when, the level of the river having dropped and the banks lowered, they return for the first time to collect the clay which they need. Dressed in white, they bring out their hoes and the sickle with which they cut the damp grasses used to cover the pots on the hearth during firing, while the head of the society carries the altars. The objects are placed in a pile on a bed of nyama fibers used for separating them from the ground. The throats of two red roosters are cut open over this pile while a prayer is addressed to Faro, requesting authorization to take the /127/ mbogo pasa during the year, and seeking his protection and help for the work of the society's membership.

The potters make an annual offering to their altars on the day their husbands sacrifice on the forges. Immediately after the libations, they come and squat before the forge altar on which they throw some ten cowrie shells. They then go to the ñintin, undress, and present to it their genitals from the front and from the back, this gesture being an indication of their submission to the spirits of pottery which are the same as those of the forge. Still naked, they circle the pile of ashes left from the last firing and light a big bonfire; this fire attracts the bee eaters, tatugu kononi, which circle over the flames. They shoot some down with a sling, cook them, and reduce them to ashes which they mix with karite oil; they rub their bodies with this mixture before purifying themselves by going through the flames. As an offering to the spirits, they then throw pots on the fire which they put out before returning home.

323 244 The potters cultivate together a small ritual field in which a female twin sows white peas, tikaninkuru, symbols of their right hand. The produce of this harvest is eaten communally on a mound, walawala, after an offering of several seeds is made to the altars and tools. A potter whose tools are broken by the fire must go through a purification with the products of this field.

326 304 The wives of blacksmiths, whether or not they are potters, are skilled in practicing excision on young girls.

304 766 The importance of the wanzo and the necessity of its leaving the person are such that in the case where a child dies uncircumcised, the operation is performed on his corpse. If this is not possible, the circumciser cuts his left ear and says:

"I cut the ear instead of circumcision" (1).

1. Mba klo tike bolokoli nona bi la ye.

It is buried with the corpse or kept in the paternal home, but the wanzo leaves the child. If the operation was not performed, it would contribute to the formation of a very dangerous nyama, which would be more aggressive even than that of an old man and from which the society would have to suffer.

/188/ Excision

304 323 189 The operation is performed with a little iron knife by a potter, the wife of a blacksmith. The blade, which is male, represents the sun; the handle, which is female, represents both the clitoris and the moon. The woman protects herself from the wanzo of the newly excised girls by wearing bracelets and charms and by smearing a black salve on her eyes.

304 323 The operation is performed in full daylight at the edge of the village and in the presence of the assembled kinsmen. In certain localities it takes place near the potters' hearth. Each little girl is seated in turn on an inverted pot and is operated upon while prayers are recited. Just as the boy whose foreskin is badly formed is wounded on the thigh, so the girl in the same situation is considered excised if she submits to a test which replaces excision. In the latter case, the woman operator places a hedgehog skin between the girl's thighs and presses these together energetically so as to make the blood run (2).

2. In case the girl is the daughter of a blacksmith, the blood running over the pottery indicates her future role as potter (see p. 169.

The young girls must neither cry nor moan; on the contrary, they sing to exalt the departure of the wanzo.

b. Pottery

323 Pottery is entirely fashioned and fired by the women of the blacksmiths' caste, masters of the fire. The modelling is done in two ways, either by hollowing a mass of clay with the aid of a cylindrical stone (2), or by rolling a cylinder of clay around a mold. The

2. M. Griaule, Masques dogons [Dogon Masks].

[531]

decoration is generally a double line of chevrons imprinted around the neck and the foot by the potter's twisted bracelet. The firing is done in the open air over a wood fire.

c. The Forge

326 Wood, iron, metals in general, are fashioned by the blacksmiths. The blacksmith's workshop and the objects he makes are simple, but they are rich in symbolic representations. "The forge represents the artisan: the furnace is his body, the bellows his testicles, the blast pipe his penis, the fire his head. When the red-hot iron is beaten by the hammer, which symbolizes the universe, the sparks are the lightning and the thunderbolt." (3) With his

3. G. Dieterlen, Essai sur la religion bambara [Essay on Bambara Religion].

rudimentary tools spread on the ground under a shelter, the artisan forges all farming instruments, the principal one being the hoe. The 412 hoe, [97] according to its shape, is considered to be male or female. 831 The female hoe has a short handle with an ovoid swelling at the end, [801] into which sticks the point of an iron triangle. The three sides of this triangle are three arcs of a circle; three, symbol of masculinity, represents here the clitoris, the male principle which sustains the [773 241] double, the dya, of the woman. (According to myth, it was with the aid of this part of the body that the first being of female sex inaugurated agricultural labors.) The male hoe has a slightly trapezoidal iron part which is attached to the handle in the same manner. The four sides symbolize the femininity of man sustained by the prepuce. Thus,

326 as well as of silver, on a wooden core. The thrones of the ancient [531] Bambara chiefs were covered in this manner. Today the golden ornaments are no longer reserved exclusively for the wives of kings. [301] Bracelets, pendants, and necklaces are produced in large quantities in a filigree work in which the Black excels.

B. Ceramics

● 323 The land is very rich in pottery, but Bambara men do not model clay, pottery being a woman's art. Inversely, the women do not work on statuary.

C. Painting

531 386 The Bambara paint murals on the sanctuary walls with ocher and a millet paste. The priests make these drawings periodically. The walls of the young people's huts are also decorated with symbolic motifs: calabash spoons, festoons, ladders with 22 bars, drawings of hands, lines of chevrons. The young girls come to paint these, [337] with clay from the river or with a mixture of clay and cow dung. All these geometric drawings are signs representing not only the cosmogony, but a subtle translation of all the movements of the executing artist's soul. They are a veritable form of writing.

D. Music

533 771 Music is a privileged art (1) because it is bound to instru-

1. Griaule, Passim, "Symbole des arts africains" [Symbol of the African Arts], Présence africaine.

ments, that is to say, to materials, to the human body by the voice and the dance, to numbers by the rhythm, to medicine, to divination, and to religion.

534 771 [106] In a report to the French Institute of Anthropology on February 18, 1948, Mme. G. Dieterlen described the structure and symbolism of the two Bambara musical instruments, the Sema guitar and the royal drum.